

## **Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health**

[forests](#) - - Rep. Scott McInnis, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6205 - - (202) 225-0691

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### **Witness Statement**

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#### **OPENING STATEMENT FOR THE HONORABLE JAMES V. HANSEN, CHAIRMAN**

#### **COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON H.R 451 MT. NEBO WILDERNESS ADJUSTMENT ACT APRIL 25, 2001**

I want to welcome Commissioner Howarth to this hearing on H.R.451. I appreciate you being with us today. As the good Commissioner knows, I have taken a particular interest in this ongoing management issue of the Mt. Nebo Wilderness Area because of my history with the legislation.

More than 15 years ago, as a junior member of this Committee, I drafted the Utah Wilderness Act of 1984 which created 800,000 acres of wilderness within the Forest Service lands in Utah, including the Mt. Nebo Wilderness area. This is a very beautiful area, rich in biological diversity, offering numerous primitive recreational opportunities, tremendous solitude and breathtaking views of the Great Basin, all within one hour of nearly 80 percent of the population of Utah. There is no question that the Mount Nebo area deserves wilderness protection.

As the members of this Committee know, creating congressionally designated wilderness is not an easy process. In Utah, we had to work through a dozen different management issues in each area we wanted to protect. We had to determine how to protect valid existing rights such as grazing, mineral development and historic access to certain areas. We had to navigate through the private inholdings issues and work with the agency and local governments to identify and draw boundaries that made the best management sense. The legislation was literally the result of hundreds of hours of negotiations. However, during the legislative process we don't always get everything buttoned up exactly the way we would like.

In this case, 17 years ago, maps were erroneously drawn which included some pre-existing developments to municipal and agricultural water systems that have supplied water to Juab County since the late 1800s inside the wilderness boundaries. These systems are old and in need of constant maintenance and care. But due to the restrictions on motorized vehicle access in wilderness areas, it is difficult, if not impossible, to adequately maintain these existing facilities.

In addition to these maintenance problems, a small piece of private land was also included that should not be inside the boundaries of the wilderness area.

I know the Forest Service is interested in working toward a solution. The Committee needs to be aware that the Forest Service has had more than 15 years to develop a solution. Commissioner Howarth will tell us that

they have been trying to reach an administrative solution since the wilderness area was declared. Given that we were forced to introduce legislation to bring about a solution is indicative that it is not likely that the problem can be solved administratively.

The best remedy is to legislatively adjust the current boundaries to exclude the water developments and the private inholdings. This bill accomplishes that. We have also adjusted the southern boundary to include an area of roadless Forest Service land to compensate for the acres removed, resulting in a slight increase in the wilderness acreage. Nephi City and the Town of Mona will have access to their water developments, inholdings will be removed and the Forest Service will have a wilderness area with less human intrusions and fewer access issues.

I know that initially, there were concerns regarding the impact of moving boundaries back up these canyons and how it might put pressure on additional development through increased public access. Administrative roads are used by all agencies. Nothing precludes the Forest Service from keeping these roads closed to the general public except motorized access to the County for the maintenance of their existing water facilities.

Ms. Collins, I look forward to hearing the testimony today and I particularly look forward to your taking my questions.

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